

Auditing Independence

Regarding “Council Relapse: Moves would replace reform with a facade” (Editorial, Feb. 12):

Your editorial stating that the mayor should remain as the appointing authority of the city’s internal auditor fails to grasp the most basic auditing concept - specifically, that the auditor must be independent from management both in fact and appearance. The auditor and audit committee’s responsibility is to be a check on city management, not a rubber stamp.

Our current system, which allows the mayor to hire and fire the city auditor, poses the most significant threat to auditor independence and public accountability. How can you honestly audit the person who not only appoints you but also has the power to fire you?

According to Government Auditing Standards, independence is defined as independence from management. Advocating for a process that would allow the mayor to handpick both the internal auditor and the audit committee would make the city’s auditing process even worse than it is now. Our former city auditor left last year because he was told by the mayor’s staff to change the conclusion of his annual report to make it appear that the city’s internal controls over financial reporting were better than they were.

As Wall Street and the financial rating agencies watch San Diego’s efforts to institute reform measures, we must show them that we are serious about setting up a responsible and independent auditing process - one that follows not only Government Auditing Standards but also one that ensures independence from both city management and uninformed political editorials.

DONNA FRYE

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